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ABSTRACT

This bulletin provides principals with tips concerning how to increase their assistant principals' effectiveness. It explains a four-part process to accomplish this task. First, principals must select the right person based on qualifications that meet the school's profile. Second, they must furnish needed training in self-assessment, goal setting, data gathering, and program evaluation for both formative and summative purposes. Third, principals must shape the job in order to meet school and district goals and objectives. Finally, they must integrate their assistant principals, once hired, into management and leadership roles by delineating their share of responsibilities in planning, organizing, and facilitating schoolwide functions. (JAM)

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Tips for Principals from NASSP November 1988

How To Increase The Assistant Principal's Effectiveness

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How To Increase The Assistant Principal's Effectiveness

The effectiveness of assistant principals (APs) depends on the principal's attitude toward the role of the assistant principal and his or her definition of the term, "effective."

The principal is the key person in increasing the AP's effectiveness. Unless the principal is an advocate of the assistant principalship, actively supporting the position and the persons occupying it through public and private recognition, the results will be disappointing. And, unless the principal sees the rich possibilities in the role of APs and provides the organization and the atmosphere for accomplishing them, some great opportunities will be lost.

Selecting the Right Person

An essential prerequisite to the AP's effectiveness is a sound and demanding procedure for selecting the individuals for the job, and principals, of course, should have a major voice in the selection process. The wisdom inherent in the old saw, "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," is obvious to anyone who has tried to make fundamental changes in human beings.

In addition to selecting the right person, another requirement for effective performance is determining the AP's role in the school administration. The traditional discipline and attendance responsibilities are not attractive to most APs—especially those whose career goals go beyond the assistant principalship. Assistant principals want experience with the responsibilities and challenges of the principalship, also.

Although student behavior and attendance are important components of administration, they are only a small part of the job. Providing general rather than specific job descriptions is practical because APs often must take over when the principal is out of the building.

In addition, the busywork that APs often have to do is not always needed; these tasks can frequently be handled by office staff members, thus freeing the APs to handle more administrative duties.

Providing Needed Training

Assistant principals, like everyone else, have strengths and weaknesses, some of which are inherent and resistant to change, such as conceptual and human relations skills and attitudes.

On the other hand, some aspects of performance are amenable to change via well-designed, on-the-job training. Large school districts often operate assessment centers that not only identify the candidates' strengths and weaknesses, but also provide appropriate needs-based training for assistant principals and other school personnel. Even in small districts that employ only a few APs, principals can build in useful training geared to weaknesses that may have surfaced during the selection process.

The principal can work with the AP in self-assessment, goal setting, data gathering, and evaluating progress for both formative and summative purposes.

Shaping the Job

Assuming that an able person has been selected for the job, and that the appropriate preservice and inservice training has been or will be provided, the next requirement for effective performance of an AP pertains to the ongoing aspects of the job itself.

Perhaps the most important concept is involving the AP in policy making, planning, and daily decision making with regard to school administration. Since the AP's authority to act must be delegated and supported by the principal, a real sharing of responsibility by means of an administrative team built on collegial relationships is essential.

Depending on the size of the school and the number of administrators involved, the specific organizational arrangements can be made to utilize APs and other school personnel most effectively. Duties can be rotated so each AP has an opportunity to experience all or most of the job responsibilities of the principal. In some schools, especially large ones, this generalization of experience is accomplished by assigning APs to grade levels. The APs follow students in their assigned grade through to graduation.

APs should attend meetings or conferences, visit schools, serve on district committees, or work with community organizations to provide community services to the schools as well as school services to the community. If school district money for trips is scarce, the principal may seek funds from other sources, such as the PTA or

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community organizations. The principal might even consider rotating some of the trips with the APs occasionally.

Instructional Leader? Manager? Both?

The answer is both. Faculty and staff members, parents, and students should know that the high priority placed on planning, organizing, and facilitating the operation of the school is a responsibility shared by principals and assistant principals. Effective administration requires effective management, and APs must be part of this action. They should be placed in charge of some of the school's important projects and, with the principal's guidance and assistance, given the authority to plan, execute, and evaluate school programs.

Effective APs must be instructional leaders as well as managers, but their training seldom prepares them for this. They must see their job as being more than that of fire fighter. Instructional leaders do not oversimplify the complex task of helping teachers to perform up to the maximum level of their capacity. For example, attendance problems are best handled by providing schooling that students view as worthwhile, and discipline problems are best dealt with by getting well-qualified teachers and training them to make their teaching seem relevant and important to the students.

This is a big order—one that is accomplished by effective instructional leadership, not by wishes or prayers or speeches. APs, if carefully selected and properly trained, can be an important part of the instructional leadership process.

Written by Kenneth E. McIntyre, professor emeritus of educational administration at the University of Texas, Austin, and member of the NASSP Council on the Assistant Principalship.

Working with the Assistant Principal

Are you providing your assistants with the kind of direction, help, supervision, and nurturing that will increase their chances of becoming good principals? Are you treating them as the important human resources they are?

Be honest, principals. Don't you find yourself forgetting those practices and giving in to the daily pressures by expecting assistant principals to "take care of" the loose ends—the jobs neither you nor anyone else wants to do?

As reminders, here are a few tasks that assistant principals typically do:

- Supervise bus loading/unloading
- Listen to teachers' explanations of problems they are having with students
- Telephone parents to check students' attendance
- Inform teachers of changes in students' placement
- Hear students describe their difficulties with teachers or students
- Fill out questionnaires
- Check restrooms.

How many of these are meaningful leadership activities? Is it reasonable to expect to train principals by giving them these to do for significant portions of their day? Are they helpful to the assistant principals' growth and development?

By now you may be thinking, "Someone has to do these things and it's better that assistant principals do them than principals." I agree, but I also believe principals need to discuss and consult with assistants to determine:

- Which of these activities are really necessary?
- Which activities can someone else on staff do?
- What alternatives are there to doing them and still achieve the desired results?

. . . Remember, your assistants are adults, learners, and individuals. They need care, nurturing, and support. . . .

From "Working with Assistant Principals To Achieve Maximum Value," by Lewis Roderick. Published in the February 1986 NASSP Bulletin.

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